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M.A. SEMESTER FOUR

AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN FICTION

**Ngugi wa Thiong'o: *A Grain of Wheat***

- Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly James Ngugi) (b.1938) is a major Kenyan novelist, dramatist and essayist.
- Born at Limuru in Kiambu district, Kenya.
- He belongs to the group of committed writers who have steadfastly worked for the emancipation and upliftment of the peasant and worker communities of his country.
- A socially conscious writer. He has tried to make the Kenyans aware and proud of their cultural heritage by explaining the colonial subjugation to his people.
- He studied initially in Kamaandura CSM School (1947-48). He was influenced by the contemporary independence struggle of the country. Ngugi and his family suffered in multiple ways. His family house and village were razed and rebuilt consequence on the project that was part of anti-Mau Mau campaign.
- Ngugi left Nairobi to pursue his studies at the University of Leeds on a British scholarship in 1964.
- He wrote *A Grain of Wheat* in the University of Leeds during his stay as a graduate and postgraduate student.
- After completing his studies, he returned to Kenya in 1967. He was appointed Lecturer in English at the University of Nairobi and became the first black African member of the department.
- In July 1982, he joined other Kenyan exiles in London to form Committee for the release of political prisoners in Kenya (CRPPK).
- Major works :
  - The Black Hermit*(1962)
  - Weep Not, Child* (1964)
  - The River Between* ( 1965)
  - This Time Tomorrow* (1966)
  - A Grain of Wheat* (1967)
  - Petals of Blood* (1977)
  - Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (1981)
  - Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986)
  - I Will Marry When I Want* (1982)
  - Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1992)
  - Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society* (1997)

- His works centre on his sufferings and those of his fellow blacks in Kenya in particular and Africa in general.
- Centering on the theme of brutality of apartheid and racism, and make the people aware to their rights and duties.
- Its biblical allusion also suggests the self-sacrificial nature that must be part of the community's efforts to rebuild the nation and be connected to the soil.
- The story takes place in the village of Thabai, which has been destroyed in the war. Among the advances in Ngugi's style in his use of irony in the book: Thabai has chosen Mugo to be its new leader, not knowing that he had earlier betrayed the patriot Kihika.
- The narrative is built around the major characters, their motivations, reactions to events and the way they act under the given circumstances till Mugo confesses his guilt. The same can be viewed in the last four chapters on how they react to Mugo's confession and get on with their lives in independent Kenya in which they see a ray of hope for the future.
- The book brings out complex web of relationships which is a thematic demonstration of the newer politics of responsibility that Ngugi brought to the writing of the book.

